

Ephesians 6:10-13

Introduction

Paul has said almost everything he wants to say in his letter to the Ephesian Christians. *Almost* everything. But now, how to end?

In the next eleven verses (6:10-20), Paul is actually going to gather up all of the last five and a half chapters into one grand finale of exhortation, and comfort, and encouragement. In other words, this next section isn't just the last part of Ephesians – it's the whole book of Ephesians now brought fully to bear on our lives in just a few verses. It's almost as if Paul started out with these verses, and then went back and wrote the rest of the letter, building all along to the goal of this conclusion (cf. Fee; quoted in O'Brien). And so we see that in a real sense, the famous "armor of God" can't be *fully* appreciated until we've listened to the entire book of Ephesians. Paul begins with these words, "tou loipou":

"From now on"*

Paul isn't saying that *now* the Ephesians should *start* doing something they'd never thought of doing before! He's not saying that what *wasn't* necessary before, *is* now (cf. Gal. 6:17). He's just giving the Ephesians a *fresh* call to live "henceforth" (cf. Thielman) – from now on – in the full light and in the full knowledge of all that he's just written. The truth is that every day of the Christian's life can, and should be characterized by these words, "from now on..." Every day should be a "forgetting what lies behind, and straining forward to what lies ahead" (Phil. 3:13). So often, as Christians, we can have the feeling that we need to put together a string of victories before we can really feel like we have a new start. We need to put together this "winning streak" of holy living before we can have that sense of hope for true change and transformation in our lives. But that means we're thinking of our own self-effort and our own human striving – which leads to a terrible, oppressive weight of bondage. That means we're ultimately rejecting God's free grace – which makes it possible for every single day of our lives to be a "from now on." By God's grace, every day can be a fresh start.

But every fresh start (every true "from now on") begins with the renewing of our minds. In Ephesians, it's a renewed understanding of what Paul calls "the mystery of [God's] will" (1:9; cf. 3:1-5, 9). So after five and a half chapters of proclaiming to us, and unpacking for us this mystery which had been hidden for ages in God (3:9), now Paul comes to the climactic goal of the entire letter with these words: "Tou loipou" ... "From now on..." – in the full light and in the full knowledge of this marvelous mystery now fully unveiled before your eyes — "From now on..."

* Everyone admits that this is a perfectly legitimate translation of the Greek. In fact, if we're just talking about the Greek, it's the most natural and likely translation. But it seems "awkward" to many people, and so it's almost always rejected in favor of the translation you have in your Bibles – "Finally." Some Greek manuscripts actually change the form of the Greek words [to loipou], which makes it even easier to translate "finally." I just don't see any real awkwardness. And so I translate as I think the Greek more naturally reads: "From now on..." (in agreement with one major commentator [Thielman])

II. “be empowered in the Lord, and in the strength of his might.”

Once again – GRACE. It’s a Greek imperative; it’s a command – *Be* empowered. But it’s also a Greek passive; it’s a command to *receive* something or be acted upon by someone else. So instead of “Be strong” we translate, “Be made strong,” or “be *empowered*.” In Ephesians three, Paul *prayed*:

- ✓ Ephesians 3:14-16 – For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that he may grant you according to the riches of His glory to ***be strengthened*** with ***power*** through his Spirit in the inner man...

Now here in Ephesians six, Paul *commands*: “***Be empowered*** in the Lord, and in the ***strength*** of His ***might***.” But it’s a command still wholly saturated with God’s grace.

“Be empowered ***in the Lord***, and in the strength of ***His*** might.” You see, there’s the passive. It’s not our might. It’s not our strength. It’s not our power. It’s His. And yet all that’s His, is *ours* through our union with Him. *All* that’s His, is ours through our union with Him. Do you believe that? Do you believe God’s Word? “Be empowered ***in the Lord***, and in the strength of ***His*** ***might***.” The key to every “from now on” is *this* wonderful and gracious command. Paul prayed in chapter one:

- ✓ Ephesians 1:16-20 — ...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him... that you may know what is... the exceeding greatness of ***His power*** toward us who believe, according to the powerful working of the ***strength*** of His ***might***, that He powerfully worked ***in Christ***.

Here’s what we need to understand: It’s *when* God is working out the “mystery of His will” – it’s then that we are treated to the most awesome, spine-tingling display of His power. And so the unpacking of the mystery for the last five and a half chapters has also been an unpacking for us of the greatness of God’s ***power*** toward us, here, who believe, according to the powerful working of the ***strength*** of His ***might***. That’s **WHY** Paul can now command us with these grace-saturated words: “From now on, be ***empowered*** in the Lord, and in the ***strength*** of His ***might***.” I’m reminded of verses like these from the Old Testament:

- ✓ 1 Samuel 30:6 — David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters. But ***David strengthened himself in the LORD his God***.
- ✓ Joshua 1:6-7, 9 — ***Be strong and courageous***, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. ***Only be strong and very courageous***, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you... Have I not commanded you? ***Be strong and courageous***. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.

If these Old Testament saints, to whom the mystery of God’s will was never made known, could be strengthened and empowered in the Lord, how much more can we, who have now seen the plan of God for the fullness of the times completely unveiled in Christ? If these Old Testament

saints could be strengthened and empowered in God's word and promises, how much more can we who are now "*in Christ*" – the one in whom all the plans and promises of God have actually come to their fulfillment (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20)? My brothers and sisters, if we've understood the revelation of the mystery of God's will in the first five and a half chapters of Ephesians – well then...! "From now on, be empowered in the Lord, and in the strength of His might!"

Now for what comes next, we need to set the stage a little more thoroughly...

(SETTING THE STAGE: Ephesians 1-6)

What *is* the mystery of God's will "which," as Paul says, "was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit"? (3:5) Paul answers in chapter one:

- ✓ Ephesians 1:9-10 — [God] made known to us the mystery of His will... for the administration of the fullness of the times *to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth, in Him*.

This is the marvelous, previously inconceivable mystery of God's will.

And how is God accomplishing this will for the uniting of all things in Christ, things in heaven, and things on earth, in Him? First of all, by reconciling us *to Himself* in Christ. But if God was to do this, what did it require? It required a full out assault on the domain of Satan.

- ✓ Ephesians 2:1-6 — And you, being dead in your trespasses and sins in which you once walked, *according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, of the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience*, among whom we all also once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath even as the rest; but God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, *made us alive together with Christ—by grace you are saved!—and raised us up together with Him and seated us together with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*.

In Christ, the victory is already ours. We who were once walking "according to the ruler of the authority of the air, of the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience" have now been fully reconciled with God – seated with Christ in the heavenly places.

How is God accomplishing the mystery of His will for the uniting of all things in Christ? First of all, by reconciling *us to Himself in Christ*. And second of all, by reconciling *us to each other in Christ*. But if God was to do this, what did it require? This also required a full out assault on Satan's domain.

- ✓ Ephesians 2:14-16; 3:8-11 (cf. 2:11-3:12) — For *he himself is our peace*, who has made both things one, and has *broken down the dividing wall of partition—the hostility...* that he might create in himself *one new man in place of the two*, so making peace, and might *reconcile them both in one body* to God through the cross, thereby *killing the hostility...* To

me... this grace was given... to bring to light for everyone what is the administration of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that ***through the church*** the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the ***rulers and authorities in the heavenly places***, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In Christ, the victory is already ours. It's already ours because we who were once alienated and even hostile to each other, in the bonds of self-love and self-worship, are now knit together as the one body of Christ. By our very existence as the Church, we are constantly announcing to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places their defeat, and the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The kingdom of Satan is built on two things: Man's rebellion against God, and man's hostility toward his neighbor. The goal of Satan is to bring division, and alienation, and enmity between God and man, and man and his neighbor. So how is God accomplishing *His will* for the uniting of all things in Christ? First, by reconciling us to Himself ***in Christ***. And second, by reconciling us to each other ***in Christ***. And both of these "impossible" feats required that God do battle against Satan and all his domain. Both of these "impossible" feats required that God go forth to war (as we'll see more next week), and display His power and bare His mighty arm. Paul describes this war and how it turned out in chapter four:

- ✓ Ephesians 4:8-10 — "When [Christ] ascended on high he led captive a host of captives; he gave gifts to men." Now what is the meaning of "he ascended" but that he also descended into the lower regions of the earth [to do battle]? He who descended is himself the one who also ascended ***far above all the heavens*** that he might fill all things.
- ✓ Ephesians 1:19-23 — [God] raised [Christ] from the dead and ***seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named***, not only in this age but also in the one to come; And He ***subjected all things under his feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body***, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

God has ***already*** waged the battle against Satan to bring about the uniting of all things in Christ. We have already been reconciled ***to God*** and ***to each other, in Christ!*** In every way, the victory has already been gained. Full and complete triumph has already been won. That's why Paul can cry out with exultation in chapter one verse three:

- ✓ Ephesians 1:3 (cf. 1:3-14) — Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing ***in the heavenly places in Christ***.

And yet... in the midst of all this victory, and triumph, and glory, Paul can still speak in chapter 4 of the danger of being:

- ✓ Ephesians 4:13-14 — ...tossed to and fro by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by ***human cunning***, by ***craftiness*** in the service of the ***scheme*** of error.

That brings to mind what Paul said about the “ruler of the authority of the air... the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience” (2:2). He says in chapter four:

- ✓ Ephesians 4:13-14 — Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your provocation, *nor give place to the devil*.

He spends a great deal of time warning us against the “unfruitful works of *darkness*” and earnestly exhorting us in light of the fact that “the days are *evil*” (4:17-18; 5:8-14, 15, 17). So now in light of all these things, Paul writes:

III. Put on the complete armor of God

that you may be able to stand *against the schemes of the devil*,
because our intense struggle is not against blood and flesh,
but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the evil spiritual beings in the heavenly places.

Because of this, take up the complete armor of God
in order that you may be able to withstand *in the evil day*, and having done everything, to stand.

The mystery of God’s will for uniting of all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth, in Him, teaches us first of all about the true nature of our *enemy* and what’s really at *stake* in the struggle. When **God** did battle, it was battle “not against blood and flesh” – that would have been no big deal, a walk in the park, a piece of cake! When *God* did battle, it was battle against the devil – against every rule, and authority, and power, and dominion in the heavenly places. And so that means that *our* intense struggle, our battle, is not against mere men. It’s not against armies with guns, or world leaders signing laws, or false teachers in the Church, or people around us who antagonize, or the constant bombardment of a pleasure seeking world. Brothers and sisters, our battle, too, is against the devil – against the rulers, the authorities, the world powers of this darkness, and the evil spiritual beings in the heavenly places. Paul gives us this list so that we feel the vastness of Satan’s resources for the onslaught that he brings against us (cf. Lincoln). Paul wants us to see, *to know*, that the struggle *is* “intense” because of *who* our enemy is. Sometimes we ask “why?” Sometimes, we’re surprised because we didn’t see it coming. But what we learn from Ephesians, and what we learn from these last few verses, is that more often than not—and whether we realize it or not—the onslaught *will be* fierce, and the battle *will be* intense. And there is strength, and even comfort, in knowing this *ahead of time*. So do not be surprised (cf. 1 Pet. 4:12; 1 Jn. 3:13). Be vigilant, and watchful, and always on the alert.

Whatever Satan’s numerous schemes and strategies may be, their goal is *always* simple: our *alienation from God* through sin and unbelief, and our *alienation from one another* through pride, and selfishness, and bitterness, and anger. Satan works incessantly to splinter and fracture and separate and divide, because he knows (far better than most of us) that God’s will is to reconcile, and unite through the blood of Christ’s cross. Think about it: Where does that put *us* in the battle – we who have now been *reconciled* to God and reconciled to each other in Christ? It puts us (you and me!) on the very front lines with neon flashing lights. It makes us the object of Satan’s full malevolence, and loathing, and hatred and therefore the target of *all his constant* attacks and schemes. Which leads us to the question: How is it that we aren’t destroyed? How is

it that we haven't fallen away from God in sin and unbelief? How is it that there is still any kind of unity and love in the body of Christ? How is it that we still have any hope?

IV. Put on the complete armor of God

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***Because of this, take up the complete armor of God
in order that you may be able to withstand*** in the evil day, ***and having done everything, to stand.***

If the mystery of God's will for the uniting of all things in Christ has taught us the true nature of our enemy and what's really at stake in the struggle, then it also teaches us our *need* for the complete armor of God and the absolute necessity of daily putting it on. *Only* the complete armor of God is sufficient for the battle. But if it's *complete*, and if it's *of God*, then it *is fully* sufficient. We'll look more at the armor next week, but for right now we just ask the question: sufficient for what? What is the armor of God sufficient to enable us to *do*? Paul answers three times, "That you may be able to *stand*... in order that you may be able to *withstand*... to *stand*..." And then Paul starts the next verse (verse 14) with these words: "***Stand***, therefore..." Why not "advance," why not "move out," why not "invade"? We stand, in this case, because the ground has already been *won* (cf. Thielman). We have already been fully reconciled by God, to Himself, and to each other, in Christ. So our task as soldiers is never to win new ground, but to stand – to preserve and maintain what Christ has already gained. Our calling is to stand firm, hold our position, resist, and never surrender to the enemy, but prevail against it. In other words, we're fighting from a position not just of tactical advantage, but of victory (cf. Lincoln). We're fighting from ground already gained not by our own strength and valor, but by "the exceeding greatness of ***God's power***... according to the powerful working of the ***strength*** of His ***might***, that He powerfully worked ***in Christ***." So as Lincoln says, we are to think here of "taking up by faith and occupying steadfastly the position which is [ours] through [our] experience of the gospel of God's grace in Christ." (Lincoln)

Conclusion

There are times when we will stumble, when the assault will be fierce and we forget the armor God has provided and the ground He has already won. There will be times when we grieve the Spirit of God, when we fall into sin and unbelieving thoughts of doubt, when we fail to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, when we feel almost at the brink of being utterly overwhelmed.

But then we hear these words: "***From now on***...", and they remind us of the Gospel in Ephesians – of that glorious mystery of God's will for the uniting of all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth, in Him. And so we get back up again, and remember with renewed hope what Paul said next:

"From now on," (!) brothers and sisters, "be empowered in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. Put on the complete armor of God that you may be able to stand against the

schemes of the devil, because our intense struggle is not against blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the evil spiritual beings in the heavenly places. Because of this, take up the complete armor of God in order that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand.”

“Stand, therefore...” my fellow soldiers in the battle. “From now on.” And then tomorrow...?
“From now on.” And then the day after that?

“From now on.”